

Drouth Tends To Draw Shortgrassers Even Closer Together

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — The forever recurring drouth phobia is returning to the Shortgrass populace. After 80 or 90 days of no rain, combined with a relentless heat wave, the citizens are becoming as spooky as a piano turner in the midst of a musician's strike.

Dry weather neurosis always has troubled these people. Let six or eight months pass without even a dew to moisten the ground, and they all come down stricken by an apprehensive fear that a drouth is on. Cloudless skies and frequent whirlwinds invariably make us yearn for other climes. At various dehydrated periods, real estate agents from other sections could have traded subdivided 40-acre swamps for 10-section ranches faster than computerized abstract machines could have transferred the deeds.

There is, however, an inexplicable force that holds the people to this fickle land. Poets, I suppose, would say that the bond is love of homeland; realists, I feel sure, would maintain that it is derived from knowing that the Shortgrass Country promises less and delivers more than nearly any scope of ranch country in the state.

As has been mentioned before in this column, besides the constant threat of dry weather, a man out here has to learn to live with about as difficult a pack of hombres as can be assembled anywhere on earth. To be more precise, the major fault of my people is that they are far too concerned about each other. Unlike the cold sophisticates in giant urban areas, the natives here are burdened by what sociologists call provincialism, which is nothing more than going around, living in the past, treating your fellow humans as if they were something else than a body to elbow out of a subway door or out-shove through an elevator entrance.

The same annoying characteristic prevails across the other portions of ranchdom. To some parties it is a popular mode of conduct. Yet the defenders and admirers of common courtesy don't realize that friendliness is and has been an over-rated virtue for years and years, or that the openness and widely advertised western hospitality of this region will keep us behind the times as long as they are practiced.

The current dry weather makes matters worse. As the scourge of drouth progresses, the inhabitants are drawn closer together. Far be it from me to ever change their ways. Regardless of how rough the situation becomes, it looks like these folks are going to stay the same to the very end.